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OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

15 November 1951

MEMORANDUM FOR THE BOARD

FROM: Task Team, NIE 55

SUBJECT: Communist Intentions with Respect to Hostilities in Korea

1. The following discussion of Communist intentions is presented without benefit of the latest IAC assessment of indications and of enemy capabilities, both essential to an analysis of intentions. It therefore represents only a preliminary and tentative presentation of Staff views and has been prepared primarily to serve as a basis for Board guidance of the Staff.

2. There are several divergent authoritative views of Communist intentions in Korea. This situation results from the fact that most of the determinants of intentions are of a subjective character and that the most important objective determinant, capabilities, presents problems of assessment from an absolute point of view as well as from the point of view of its relative importance as a determining factor. The following are representative of views currently held by various competent sources:

a. The Chinese Communists strongly desire a cease fire while the Soviets and North Koreans desire a continuation of the war.

b. The Soviets want a cease fire, but the Chinese Communists desire a continuation of the conflict.

c. Cease-fire talks were initiated purely as a military stratagem to mask preparations for further offensive operations in Korea.

d. The Chinese Communists will go on fighting indefinitely since their original terms for a cease fire along or near the 38th Parallel were rejected.

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e. If there is a cease fire in Korea, the Communists will relax their pressures elsewhere in the Far East.

f. If there is a cease fire in Korea, the Communists will intensify their pressures elsewhere in the Far East.

3. In the following paragraphs we will discuss three major questions:
- A. Do the Communists want a cease fire in Korea and if so, on what terms?
 - B. If a cease fire is not achieved, what courses of action will the Communists follow in Korea and elsewhere in the Far East? and C. If a cease fire is achieved in Korea, what courses of action will the Communists follow in Korea and elsewhere in the Far East?

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A. Do the Communists Desire a Cease Fire in Korea and, if so, on What Terms?

4. We believe that the Chinese Communists desire a cease fire in Korea and hope to obtain an agreement along the existing military line without making further commitments for inspection, exchange of PW's, or withdrawal of foreign troops. If a cease fire on these terms cannot be obtained, we do not believe that the Chinese Communist desire for a cease fire is so strong as to prompt the Chinese Communists to make more than token concessions to other UN conditions in further negotiations for a cease fire. We believe that the USSR has been even less willing than the Chinese Communists to negotiate a cease fire short of the 38th Parallel but, being unwilling or unable to provide the assistance necessary for decisive Communist military action in Korea, apparently is offering no serious objections to present Chinese Communist cease-fire efforts. We believe that the North Korean regime probably desires a continuation of efforts to drive UN forces from Korea, or at least desires the re-establishment of the 38th Parallel boundary, but is forced to adjust its position to that of the USSR and Communist China.

5. This assessment of Communist intentions is based in part on the following considerations:

a. Thus far at least, both the Chinese Communists and the USSR apparently have limited their commitments in Korea. The Chinese appear to have been unwilling to risk exhausting their resources to drive UN forces beyond the 38th Parallel; and the USSR has apparently been unwilling to risk general war by participating in the Korean hostilities to the extent necessary to provide the Communists with the capability of destroying UN forces in Korea. The USSR almost certainly must have calculated initially that the North Koreans would quickly overrun Korea. Several months later, the introduction of new forces became essential -- in the Communist view -- to preserve the security of the Chinese and Soviet frontiers and to restore the North Korean regime and the prestige of international Communism. At least one reason for the use of Chinese Communist rather than Soviet forces was probably the Communist desire to minimize the danger of global war. Again, it must have appeared to the Communists that a limited Chinese commitment would result in a total victory in Korea. Certainly by June 1951, it must have become apparent to the Communists that additional forces would be necessary to drive out the UN, and even to defend North Korea and maintain the security of Communist forces in Korea.

b. Although the Chinese have been committing more heavy equipment to Korea, and although the Soviets have made strenuous efforts to build up Communist air capabilities, it still does not appear that the Communists are preparing to commit sufficient strength in Korea to defeat the UN

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forces. This could only be done if both the Chinese and Soviets were willing to make much greater commitment in Korea involving grave risks of global war. Chinese and Soviet strategy for Asia probably does not require an immediate achievement of their objectives at the risk of general war. Rather, it is long term and patient. Time will split the unity of the West, time will enable Russia to arm and train a modern Chinese army, time is in the Communist favor in SEA where the liberation armies with Chinese support are prepared for long-term struggles after the pattern of Mao's in China.

c. Meanwhile the support of the Korean war has resulted in mounting pressures on the Chinese Communist and North Korean regime, and the political, economic, and military strains in China promise to increase as the war continues. Furthermore, these strains result from a campaign which, in terms of the present Communist commitment, no longer offers promise of a successful military resolution and which has inhibited support to revolutionary activity in SEA.

d. As the Korean war continues and Chinese Communist resources are dissipated in Korea, Peiping becomes increasingly dependent on the USSR. However, it is likely that a high priority Chinese Communist objective is to develop a sufficiently strong economic and military position to insure equality in their relationships with the USSR. Thus, the Chinese Communists may desire a cessation of hostilities in Korea not only because the operation has been costly but because a tactical retreat in Korea will afford opportunities for preparing for long-range major struggles.

e. The USSR has a great prestige stake in Korea in that the North Korean regime was a Soviet creation. If the Kremlin has estimated that it could avoid involvement in general war indefinitely, it probably would be willing to have an indecisive Korean conflict continue in order to (i) avoid an unsatisfactory settlement in Korea; (ii) continue the drain on Western resources as part of a global effort to strain the economies and military effort of the West; (iii) increase the vulnerability of Communist China to Soviet penetration and control, and (iv) provide opportunities for combat experience for Soviet pilots and an evaluation of Soviet and UN equipment.

f. Arguments to the effect that the USSR desires a cease fire in Korea as part of a plan to promote the relaxation of international tensions does appear to be supportable. There are few indications that the present strategy of the USSR is directed to such an end. Rather, Soviet strategy appears to be based on a "belligerent defense" in which the USSR holds on to everything it has; deliberately maintains and even promotes tensions; devotes a maximum effort to defensive preparations; and waits for the West to weaken as Soviet-provoked tensions create exploitable social and economic pressures within the Western alliance.

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6. Another view of Communist intentions for which a strong argument can be made is that the continuation of the cease-fire talks have become a stratagem designed to cover the air build-up in Manchuria and the training and deployment into Korea of Chinese Communist units equipped with modern Soviet weapons. This assessment of Communist intentions may, in fact, be only a modification of the estimate made in Paragraph 4 since it, too, rests on the belief that the Communists initially desired a cease fire on favorable terms but UN conduct of the negotiations convinced them that an acceptable cease fire could not be obtained. Arguments advanced in support of this or similar views are as follows:

a. The Peiping regime is not disturbed by the losses in Korea and views the continuation of the war as an opportunity to extract modern military equipment from the USSR to develop a modern military force in China.

b. One of the major Chinese Communist objectives in Asia is a weak or friendly Japan. UN forces must be driven or withdrawn from Korea to permit effective action against Japan and to forestall the potential threat posed by a re-armed Japan. Therefore, the Chinese cannot accept any resolution of the Korean war which does not result in withdrawal of UN forces from Korea.

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B. If a Cease Fire in Korea Is Not Consummated, What Are Probable Communist Courses of Action?

In Korea

7. A final breakdown of cease-fire negotiations will almost certainly result in a reassessment by the Communists of their military position in Korea. The history of the military operation in Korea makes abundantly evident the fact that the Communists cannot hope successfully to maintain a sustained large-scale military operation without the introduction of armor and air power. If the Chinese Communists are to continue hostilities in Korea, they almost certainly will endeavor within the limits of their capabilities to introduce these two military elements. Intelligence reports indicate that the Communists have been moving tanks and artillery into Korea, although not in a quantity sufficient to indicate an intention to undertake an early offensive. The build-up of air power, however, which has been substantial in the last few months, may indicate an intention to conduct large-scale air operations against UN targets including UN forces.

8. We believe that the Communists have modified their maximum objective of forcing the UN from all of Korea as a consequence of the demonstrated capabilities of the UN. Although this maximum objective may have been modified, we believe that minimum Communist aims in Korea remain unchanged. Specifically, we believe that Communist retention of a substantial area of northern Korea is regarded as vital to the security of the USSR and Communist China and that if UN forces succeed in penetrating this area, the USSR will introduce additional Soviet forces even at the serious risk of general war with the US.

Elsewhere in Asia

9. If cease-fire negotiations break down, we believe that the continued presence of the US Seventh Fleet and the increased Communist military effort that will be required in Korea will result in an indefinite postponement of any military action against Formosa. The continuing and heavy requirements of the Korean war will further restrict Chinese Communist operations with respect to Indochina and Burma. Large-scale military action against both Indochina and Burma would probably not be undertaken. However, such action against either one of those countries would still remain a continuing possibility. Unless the Communists decide to greatly increase the risk of general war, an attack on Hong Kong or Japan is not probable.

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C. If a Cease Fire in Korea Is Consummated, What Are Probable Communist Courses of Action?

10. We believe that if Communist China agrees to a cease fire under the minimum terms which the UN now postulates, it would be a firm indication of a Chinese Communist intent to concentrate on the development of a stronger economic and military base in preparation for a long term struggle against the West rather than an indication of Communist intentions to relax tensions in the Far East. We believe that the Chinese Communists would use resources made available as a result of the diminished commitment in Korea to increase their covert assistance to revolutionary movements in S.E.A. We do not believe, however, that the Chinese Communists would, within the next year or two, risk a repetition of the Korean experience by openly invading Indochina or Burma.